

Families of Children with Special Needs

Thinking About Respite Options for Your Family

"Sometimes I feel like I spend my whole day changing diapers, pouring juice, and tying shoes!"

What is Respite?

Respite means getting a temporary break from caregiving responsibilities. Respite is a time to relax, rest, and rejuvenate. It is well-deserved time for parents so they can provide a caring and loving environment for their families.

A period of respite could be as simple as 5 minutes of quiet to drink your cup of coffee in the morning while your spouse gets the kids ready for school...or two hours of care by a friend or



neighbor while you take a nap, run errands, or take a walk...or it could involve longer periods of time so that parents have time to nurture other relationships, gain perspective, or engage in other activities.

"I find that I'm much happier and a better parent when I've had some time for myself, even if it's only for a little while."

Oftentimes, parents of children with special needs have a more difficult time finding ways to get respite breaks. Sometimes they may have difficulty finding the right person to provide care for their child, or they may feel that it isn't a good time to leave the child with another person. Taking respite breaks isn't always easy, but it's important to think about what will work for you and your family.



Why is respite important?

Taking a break from caregiving can benefit you and your whole family.

Respite can:

- ⌋ Provide a chance for your child to meet and spend time with other children and adults outside of your family, and learn to play and interact socially with others.
- ⌋ Offer a time for parents to have time with each other to strengthen their relationship as a couple and provide time to communicate about their children.
- ⌋ Give parents a chance to spend time with other children and family members.
- ⌋ Provide parents with a time to rest and gain perspective on difficult parenting issues.



"In many ways, finding someone to provide respite is just one more task to do but for me, the break is worth it!"

Exploring Respite Options

Talk with local professionals and agencies about what respite options are available in your community. Remember that ultimately you will need to find and prepare anyone who provides care for your child--you know your child best, and can convey important information about how to best care for your child during your absence. It is often helpful to have someone spend time with your family observing daily routines, behaviors, and mealtimes, so that care can be consistent with your parenting style and preferences.

"I have a cousin that we visit regularly who has always been really nice to my kids and supportive of us. Finally one day I asked her 'Would you ever want to come over and babysit for us?'"

Getting Started - Respite Strategies for Your Family!

- ⌋ Provide reciprocal care for another family who would like a break.
- ⌋ Ask someone to help who has ongoing involvement with your family and who you trust.
- ⌋ Ask for support through your neighborhood place of worship.
- ⌋ Explore whether your local senior center has volunteers with experience with children with special needs.
- ⌋ Find a teenager in your neighborhood or through a teen service organization who might be willing to be a mother's helper a few afternoons a week.
- ⌋ Talk with your local parent support group to see if anyone can offer suggestions.
- ⌋ Contact area child care centers or family child care providers to see if they are interested in providing some part time child care for you.
- ⌋ Be creative with your work and family schedules so that you and your spouse each have some time to do individual activities, as well as time to spend together as a couple.



Excerpted and adapted from *A Practical Guide for Respite for Your Family* (1996). Respite Resource Project, Partnership for People with Disabilities, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia © 2002 For more information call 804-828-8587